



Aalto University  
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Mikkeli Campus

## FAST FASHION – THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE INDUSTRY

Sofia Pääkkönen

International Business  
Bachelor's Thesis  
Supervisor: Dominika Mirońska  
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### **Objectives**

The main objectives of this study were to explore the environmental issues of the fast fashion industry and the consumer attitudes towards it, in addition to analyzing the possibilities for sustainable changes the industry can implement.

### **Summary**

The term and evolution of fast fashion were introduced prior to the literature review, which consisted of research regarding the environmental issues of the fast fashion industry, consumer attitudes towards it and the possibilities for a more sustainable fast fashion market. A conceptual framework was presented based on this research, which presented the different relationships between attitudes and behavior toward the fast fashion industry, as well as environmental awareness. A qualitative interview was conducted via a focus group, in order to gain information regarding the consumer attitudes towards the fast fashion industry and the surrounding factors on a more descriptive level. Following the interviews, the data is analyzed, and findings were conducted to meet the research objectives of this study.

### **Conclusions**

Several environmental challenges of the fast fashion industry were found, such as the use of unsustainable materials, packaging, transporting and waste. The consumer attitudes toward the industry were discovered to be mostly negative and a relationship to environmental awareness and behavior was found. For a more sustainable industry, textile waste and resource consumption should be reduced, and more environmentally friendly materials used. Consumers should be affected into purchasing less and utilizing most out of the purchased clothing in addition to companies being more transparent, honest and clear about their sustainability initiatives.

**Key words:** fast fashion, sustainability, consumer attitudes, environmental sustainability, environment

**Language:** English

**Grade:**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This bachelor's thesis discusses the environmental issues the fast fashion industry faces and possible future implications to combat them, in addition to the consumer perceptions and attitudes concerning the phenomena. Firstly, this thesis will introduce the term fast fashion and go over the evolution of the garment industry into what it is now – largely saturated by fast fashion. In the second part, research achievements to this date are gone over in the literature review regarding the environmental issues of the fast fashion industry, consumer attitudes towards it and the possibilities for a more sustainable fast fashion market. Following this, primary qualitative data about consumer attitudes towards the fast fashion industry are analyzed in order to answer the research questions.

### 1.1. Definition of Fast Fashion

The concept of fast fashion is fairly new, since the word has only been used for a couple of decades. Caro and Martínez-de-Albéniz (2015) state that “the term fast fashion has become ubiquitous and it has been used indiscriminately to describe almost any specialty apparel retailer below a certain price threshold.” Adding to this, Bick et al. (2018) state that the term is used for clothing that is made inexpensively and is readily available. Cachon and Swinney (2011) specify that fast fashion is a system that includes short production and distribution lead times, also known as quick response techniques, as well as highly trendy designs. The overall consensus is that low price points play an important role next to ready availability.

### 1.2. Evolution of Fast Fashion

Particularly over the past few decades, the fast fashion phenomenon has revolutionized the garment industry (McNeill and Moore, 2015). This evolution of the garment industry, which has led to environmental abuse throughout the operations of the entire supply chain, will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

In order to gain perception of the fast-paced evolution of the fashion industry, it is beneficial to look back in time. Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010) wrote the following:

Until the mid 1980s, success in the fashion industry was based on low cost mass production of standardized styles that did not change frequently due to the design restrictions of the factories, such as Levi's 501 jeans and a man's white shirt, although there were exceptional cases of rapid changing haute couture.

When the late 1980s came around, the forecasting of consumer demands and fashion trends started to play a role in being able to compete in the market (Guercini, 2001) as well as a noticeable increase in the import of fashionable garments due to consumers becoming more fashion-conscious (Bailey, 2001). The fashion garments sold to consumers had a seasonal range for the whole year, consisting of the yearly pattern of spring/summer and autumn/winter, with the stages starting from the introduction and adoption by fashion leaders leading to maturation via public acceptance and finally the decline of the trend (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010).

In the beginning of 1990's, more seasons to the fashion calendar started to emerge by adding new phases to the existing seasons, adding variety to the product ranges for the retailers as well as pressure for suppliers to distribute garments in a smaller time frame (Tyler et al. 2006; Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Since the number of competitors in the garment industry increased significantly in a few decades, the speed to market of getting the trendy styles for consumers became an important aspect for fashion companies in order to compete (Barnes and Lea- Greenwood 2006).

The concept of quick response which shortened lead times, while keeping low costs can be dated back to the 1980's, which adapted the infrastructure of the garment industry (Tyler et al. 2006; Choi, 2016). The quick response method grew in popularity from the time it had been introduced (Jones 1995). As low costs became more important for fashion companies to pursue and gain a cost advantage, outsourcing manufacturing to lower income countries, such as China and Bangladesh, became more and more popular. An issue with outsourcing became the

longer lead times due to the long distances and importing procedures (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). However, the garment industry was able to improve their operational performances following the quick response method and the changes have been proved to be effective even with longer physical distances (Cook and Yurchisin, 2017).

Throughout history, a large part in the fashion industry has been played by runways and the latest fashion shows, which have evolved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century into an increasingly public phenomenon through fashion magazines and the internet (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Fast fashion companies used this in their advantage in order to attract the fashion-conscious consumers to interpretations of these exclusive designs at low price points with a short lead time of three to five weeks, compared to the traditional two to four seasons per year. Therefore, fast fashion retailers are able to increase the number of seasons to being as high as twenty-four per year (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2006). This means in practice that the clothing in stores changes in a much higher frequency than before. New collections may be introduced every few weeks, making the previous trends old and expired. Therefore, garments have currently a shorter life cycle and the profit margins for retailers consequently have grown (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017).

The garment industry in whole has shifted from a production-driven to a market-driven approach (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). The fashion market has experienced a shift from forecasting future trends to using real-time data from consumers in order to have a faster response to the desires and demands of the market (Jackson 2001). Without the correct use of this more modern approach, the retailer is left outnumbered by their competitors with shorter lead times (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010), thus attracting less of the trend-driven consumers. In today's market, it is vital to have high flexibility and fast responsiveness. The process of forecasting and product planning has shifted to replicating known designs increasingly frequently due to the constantly varying consumer demands (Christopher et al. 2004).

The number of garments consumers purchase has grown substantially, alone in the EU it has increased by 40% per person in a few decades according to a European



Parliament briefing by Šajn (2019). In addition, the United States consume currently the largest quantities of clothing and textiles out of all countries and on a global scale, since 80 billion pieces of new clothing are purchased each year, which translates to 1.2 trillion dollars annually for the entire fashion industry (Bick et al., 2018). As previously is noted, this increase in demand has led to changes in the way a company must operate to stay profitable (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). The profit margins for retailers are larger if the company is able to adapt faster market responsiveness and shorter lead times compared to their competitors (Christopher et al., 2004). In the fast fashion industry, the key is producing large quantities of garments in a rapid speed, low cost, short lead times and with an increased number of fashion seasons (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Several global brands, such as H&M, Zara, Bershka, Forever 21, New Look, Uniqlo and Topshop follow this fast fashion strategy currently.

### 1.3. Research Problem, Questions and Objectives

Based on the nature of the fast fashion industry currently, which has evolved to a more unsustainable direction over the years, the main research problem for this thesis is built. It is a growing trend amongst consumers to purchase more garments with less money while having insignificant changes in attitudes or behavior towards the industry which causes increasing amounts of environmental harm.

In addition to the environmental harm and consumer attitudes toward the industry, the future of fast fashion is looked into. The research problem taps into the possibilities for a more sustainable industry, to go in line with the evolving and a more sustainability-driven world. In fact, companies have started taking actions in lowering their carbon footprint and environmental toll. With positive changes, there are still several negative aspects in the fast fashion industry and the fundamentally unsustainable market of clothes having a short life span and a cheap price. This phenomenon is explored.

The following research questions have been constructed in order to support the research problem and aim of this thesis of exploring and analyzing the environmental

challenges of the fast fashion industry, consumer attitudes toward it and the possible future of a more sustainable market.

RQ1: What are the environmental challenges throughout the supply chain of the fast fashion industry?

RQ2: What are the consumer attitudes toward the fast fashion industry?

RQ3: How can the fast fashion market change to enhance a more sustainable future?

In order to thoroughly go over these, secondary and primary research is conducted with the help of the research objectives listed below.

RO1: Find out the environmental issues fast fashion companies have in their different processes throughout the supply chain currently.

RO2: Explore the consumer attitudes towards the fast fashion industry.

RO3: Find out what consumers know about the environmental impact of the fast fashion industry currently.

RO4: Explore how do consumers describe their attitudes toward the fast fashion industry through a qualitative survey.

RO5: Discover why there is a possible gap between environmental awareness and attitudes of consumers toward the fast fashion industry.

RO6: Explore what are the possibilities for the fast fashion industry to be more environmentally sustainable.

RO7: Research how can the fast fashion industry be shifted to a more sustainable direction.

RO8: Explore the possible impact of consumer attitudes on the future of the fast fashion market.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to study research achievements to date regarding the environmental issues of the fast fashion industry, consumer attitudes

towards it, and the sustainable development of the fast fashion market in order to be able to operate in the future. This literature review will start by going over the environmental issues the fast fashion industry faces. Following this, the consumer attitudes towards the industry and the matters affecting it are focused on. Finally, the sustainable development of the fast fashion market will be analyzed.

## 2.1. Environmental issues of the Fast Fashion Industry

In this section, the environmental impact of the garment industry, which is substantial in our world today, is discussed (Bly et al., 2015). In fact, the clothing industry is currently responsible for being the second-worst offender of the environment, right after the oil-industry (Minney, 2016). The business strategy of the fast fashion industry, which contributes to its competitive advantages, are also the most environmentally harmful ones, as will be pointed out. The environmental toll of the garment industry will be identified, consisting of issues throughout the entire supply chain, including the resources used to produce the raw materials and the disposal habits regarding the textiles (Yuriko, 2018). Some of these issues in the garment manufacturing process will be further analyzed, such as the use of resources that cause a harm to the environment (Gam et al., 2010). In addition, the fabric waste resulting from the industry and the disposable item culture within the consumer perception will be brought up (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2011; Jung and Jin, 2014). Additional points to be highlighted are the unsustainable toxic dyes and finishes used to manufacture fabrics, as well as the large amount of resources and textiles that are packaged and transported. To conclude the discussion of the environmental issues regarding the fast fashion industry, the harmful actions that are put into caring for the pieces following the purchase, such as the use of water, detergent and electricity, are presented (Yuriko, 2018).

### 2.1.1. Business Strategy

Frequent assortment changes, quick response and fashionable designs at low prices are key elements for the fast fashion business strategy (Caro and Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015; Garcia-Torres et al., 2017). According to Cachon and Swinney (2011), “quick response strategies have been relatively well studied, and are known

to yield significant value to firms by better matching supply and demand.” It is highlighted that the business strategy requires a high degree of responsiveness and efficiency (Turker and Altuntas, 2014).

The fast fashion business strategy encourages consumers to change their wardrobes often with the short life cycle of clothes and the fast pace of changing trends (Byun and Sternquist, 2008). Bick et al. (2018) state that “The fast fashion model encourages consumers to view clothing as disposable.” Fast fashion can be viewed as a waste, since consumers purchase several lower quality items that are worn less and discarded at a higher pace instead of purchasing fewer higher quality items to satisfy their wardrobe need (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Fast fashion companies place more value on low prices in the garments instead high and long-lasting qualities, which leads to consumers purchasing more clothing than they need (Jung and Jin, 2014). Supporting this, McNeill and Moore (2015) argue that through producing clothing with low quality, it guarantees higher profit margins via repurchases of the same or similar product. As the quality of the garments is lower, the clothes are worn only a handful of times, hence the business strategy does not encourage the sustainable use of clothing (Ghemawat and Nueno, 2003). Since these large amounts of garments are produced at a constant pace, there naturally is a lot of textile waste emerging from the garments, which is often sent straight to incinerators or to landfills (Šajn, 2019).

Fast fashion retailers have a large number of seasons, which results in clearance sales that are held often at the end of each season to liquidate the excess stock and make space for new pieces in the upcoming fashion season (Caro and Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). This decreases the prices further and works as an incentive for consumers to purchase more low-cost garments, which can be an issue for retailers due to consumers being able to anticipate the future markdowns (Cachon and Swinney, 2011). However, Cook and Yurchisin (2017) bring up that due to fast fashion retailers being able to provide fashionable and trendy pieces inexpensively, consumers are likely to pay the full price immediately instead of waiting.

### 2.1.2. Materials

Cotton and polyester are the most common materials to produce clothing. In fact, around 90% of garments sold in the United States are made from these materials (Khan and Malik, 2013). However, both materials have significant health and environmental impacts on the environment. In general, the resources used to produce raw materials for the garment industry have a substantial environmental toll and lead to the degradation of natural resources (Šajn, 2019).

Polyester is harmful for the environment, since it is derived from oil and is non-biodegradable. According (Šajn, 2019), “one load of laundry of polyester clothes (also nylon and acrylic) can discharge 700 000 microplastic fibres.” This leads to an estimation of around half a million tonnes of plastic microfibers ending up in the ocean yearly simply from washing garments made from polyester. The environmental harm cotton is responsible for is due to the large quantities of water and pesticides it requires to grow (Khan and Malik, 2013; Šajn, 2019). To enhance this, the 2019 Ethical fashion report stated that up to 20,000 liters of water is used to produce only 1 kg of cotton and an example of a large consequence majorly resulting from cotton production is the 90% of water that has vanished from one of the world’s largest water bodies, the Aral Sea located in Central Asia (White, 2013). In addition, cotton is estimated to require 10% of the annual world-wide usage of all synthetic pesticides, since it is highly vulnerable for insect attacks (Gam et al., 2010). Large quantities of water are also consumed to dye textiles. According to Hiller Connell and Kozar (2012), 132.5 l of water is used in order to dye one pound of fabric. The textile dyeing process also results in hazardous wastewater often discarded improperly to the local water systems, which may impact the living beings of the area (Bick et al., 2018).

### 2.1.3. Packaging and Transport

Once the garments are ready to be transported to the retailers and consumers, the items are packaged for safe and clean transit. The packaging materials, such as plastic, are harmful to the environment and end up in the landfills after the product has been delivered (Bick et al., 2018). In addition to this, the rise of globalization and low-cost outsourcing of production has led to larger quantities of garments being transported adding to the overall CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Turker and Altuntas, 2014), not

only between the supply chains, but also on the journey to the end consumers (Jung and Jin, 2014). Due to the time pressures on fast fashion garments to arrive to the stores during the correct fashion season, most of the products are delivered by air, which adds to the previously mentioned carbon footprint of the transport process (Turker and Altuntas, 2014).

#### 2.1.4. Textile waste

The fast fashion model encourages consumers to see and treat garments as disposable goods (Bick et al., 2018), which leads to large amounts of textile waste, and as the used clothing usually ends up in landfills, the solid waste loads on this planet increases (Jung and Jin, 2014). Nikolina Šajn (2019) stated that over a half of the clothing that is purchased is not recycled and end up in the mixed waste heading to incinerators or the landfills. In the United States alone, according to Hobson (2013), around 85% of the garments consumed, which translates to 3,8 billion pounds annually, ends up at landfills taking up 5% of the available space. This is almost 80 pounds of discarded clothing sent to landfills per an American. Contributing to this issue, fast fashion which is often made from low-quality materials is difficult and, in some cases, impossible to recycle and the costs are often too large to be worth the trouble (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2011).

Clothing may be sent to the second-hand clothing trade through donating if not discarded to landfills (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2011). Majority of the sent clothes are compressed into 1000-pound bales and exported overseas into low- and middle-income countries to be sorted, categorized and re-baled by the low-wage labor to finally be sold in the second-hand markets (Bick et al., 2018). This results in almost 500,000 tons of used clothing yearly that is exported abroad from the United States alone (Anguelov, 2016). In the study conducted by Bianchi and Birtwistle (2011), consumers see the act of donating their old garments as environmentally friendly recycling behavior. However, the exported garments that are not sold, end up as solid waste and result in large environmental issues in these low- and middle-income countries without proper waste systems (Bick et al., 2018), therefore there seems to be a lack of awareness of the actual environmental impacts of donating garments. In addition to the discarded garments consumers are responsible for, the fabric waste

from the industry, which consists of the spare textiles left over from the manufacturing process as well as the unsold clothing are responsible for a significant amount of textile waste (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2011).

## 2.2. Consumer Attitudes Towards Fast Fashion

In the age of globalization, information moves around the world at an increased pace. According to Hoffman (2007), the seasonal trends around the world give consumers more choice regarding their purchasing options, which leads to increased shopping habits. Due to this, it is an important quality for a retailer to be able to provide consumers with the correct products in time for their demand, which we call fast fashion (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). The consumers are currently very fashion conscious and receive information about trends from several sources, which results in high demand for the latest trends (McNeill and Moore, 2015). Therefore, fast fashion gains a growing importance in the demand for consumers.

A driver for the consumer's urge to purchase from fast fashion retailers, such as Zara and H&M, is the desire to gain immediate gratification from purchasing inexpensive yet trendy pieces (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). However, Crewe and Davenport (1992) brought up a difference between the perceptions different generations have towards fast fashion with younger population being more interested in larger quantities of low-priced and -quality clothing in contrary to older population preferring having fewer garments with higher quality. Another point is brought up by the study conducted by McNeill and Moore (2015), which suggests that there are three types of consumers regarding their behavior and attitudes towards purchasing fast fashion. The first group prioritize their own needs and wants regarding purchasing the new and inexpensive trendy fast fashion pieces with little regard to sustainability. The second group have favorable views toward the sustainable options; however, their attitudes do not translate in their actions due to a low amount of sustainable behavior. The last group of consumers have high concerns about sustainability and prioritize sustainable products over everything, avoiding fast fashion.

Similar findings were presented by Bly et al. (2015) who suggest that in general, sustainability concerns do not play a significant factor in making the purchasing

choice of fast fashion garments and there often seems to be a mismatch between the action's consumers believe are sustainable than what actually are. Also, it is argued that consumers increasingly care about the unethical practices of the fast fashion industry (McNeill and Moore, 2015). However, these attitudes rarely translate to the behavior, and fast fashion is consumed even knowing the unethical route it has taken (Bray et al., 2011).

### 2.2.1. Consumerism

Consumerism and fast fashion walk along hand in hand. As Lister (2016) describes, consumerism “refers to the excessive overconsumption of consumer goods without regard to the negative impacts to people and the planet.” Trentmann (2004) describes consumerism to be ‘the lure of material goods for individuals’ and Doran (2009) considers consumerism to be an act of consuming products beyond an individual's needs. Consumerism is seen to root from the needs that companies create, which are not considered to be basic human needs (Lister, 2016). Weber et al. (2016) propose that consumerism has shifted the significance of garments from having a physical function, such as staying warm, to having an emotional value, such as feeling beautiful. Since fast fashion garments are sold at noticeably low prices consumers are more probable to overconsume the unsustainable products (Bick et al., 2018; Caro and Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015).

### 2.2.2. Drivers to Consume Fast Fashion

Fast fashion enables almost anyone, not dependent on their income level, to be able to purchase up-to-date trends and clothing pieces, which was once a priority only for the elite, due to the low prices and high availability of fast fashion (Cook and Yurchisin, 2017). Shopping in large quantities and often is seen more normal than ever. In addition, consumers find it increasingly important to express themselves through clothing and they find satisfaction in purchasing new garments on a regular basis and thus be ‘fashionable’ as well as fit within the bounds of social norms (McNeill and Moore, 2015). As discussed, sustainability is not often seen as a dominating quality, when trying to achieve these goals (Gwozdz and Reisch, 2015).



It is stated in a research by Birtwistle and Moore (2007) that consumers have low knowledge on the environmental issues of the garment industry. However, in a later study, Bianchi and Birtwistle (2011) argue that some consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental impacts of their purchasing choices. Thus, Carrigan and Attalla (2001) believe that other factors than knowledge play a larger part in a consumer's behavior when making the purchase decision, such as value, price, brand image and trends (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004). Cook and Yurchisin (2017) agree by bringing up that the fast fashion business model, which consists of low and affordable prices is one of the main drivers for consumers to purchase the clothing.

#### 2.2.2.1. Price

As Caro and Martínez-de-Albéniz (2015) have stated, fast fashion retailers sell 'inexpensive fashion'. Due to the cheap manufacturing and materials companies use to produce garments, these low prices, of an average clothing piece costing \$14.60 in the United States, are possible (Weber et al., 2016). These low-price points for trendy garments are a large incentive for mainstream consumers to purchase fast fashion clothes (Cook and Yurchisin, 2017). In fact, Byun and Sternquist (2008) described low prices and bargains to be of the main reasons for consumers to purchase fast fashion in large quantities more frequently, due to it feeling more acceptable. To support this, in the study conducted by Gabrielli et al. (2013), consumers considered the low prices of fast fashion to be a substantially important characteristic they valued in the garments. Thus, inexpensively priced clothing plays a large part in why fast fashion is favored (Cook and Yurchisin, 2017).

#### 2.2.2.2. Trends

An important characteristic of fast fashion is the enhanced design of the products that are trendy and possible to purchase by the masses (Turker and Altuntas, 2014), since consumers are continuously becoming more fashion-conscious (Bailey, 2001). These fashionable designs the fast fashion garments intel leads to consumers being more probable to purchase the products immediately and visit stores more often, even with the possibility of future reductions (Cachon and Swinney, 2011; Cook and

Yurchisin, 2017). In addition, consumers have a desire to seek out the latest fashion trends, which change often, leading to unsustainable choices and frequent disposal of 'untrendy' pieces (McNeill and Moore, 2015).

#### 2.2.2.3. Seasonality

Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) highlight that the fast fashion business model acknowledges and supports the consumers demand for 'newness', which leads to a growing number of fashion seasons (McNeill and Moore, 2015). With the quick response systems, retailers are able to announce new fashion seasons following the current trends and demands (Cook and Yurchisin, 2017). Consumers currently view the lifetime of clothing to be fairly short (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2011), and since clothes are produced for each season particularly, the garments purchased during the previous season become outdated when the new collection arrives to the stores. Elaborating on this, Bianchi and Birtwistle (2011) report that several large fast fashion retailers introduce new collections every 2-3 weeks. This frequent renewal of collections leads to clothing having short shelf-life cycles (Byun and Sternquist, 2008).

### 2.3. Sustainable Development of the Fast Fashion Market

Environmental sustainability and sustainable consumption are increasingly important in order to support the ability of the current and future generations to meet their needs, without causing irreversible damage to the environment (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2011). Therefore, in the following section, the several actions and initiatives that the unsustainable fast fashion industry should take in order to be more able to operate in the future are analyzed (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017; Šajin, 2019). Some recommendations include placing weight on reducing garment waste and resource consumption as well as replacing harmful chemicals with environmentally friendly materials. In addition, it is proposed that consumer consumption should be controlled or affected in a way that does not promote high amounts of 'single use' clothes (Jung and Jin, 2014). It is also highlighted, that by prolonging the garments lifecycle and maximizing its utility, it can be used for a longer time and less items are needed for the consumer to feel satisfied.

### 2.3.1. Fast Fashion Companies' Sustainability Reporting and Initiatives

Fast fashion companies have started to take actions in a more sustainable direction by reporting and adopting some practices that address the increasing environmental problems that are noted by the public (Turker and Altuntas, 2014). Some companies have even used environmental sustainability as a competing strategy against other commonly known unsustainable companies by taking on incentives and elaborating on them publicly (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2011). This can be often regarded as 'greenwashing' (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017). However, all sustainability reporting lies on the willingness of the company to be transparent and share details of their actions.

Sustainability reporting frameworks are created in order to create common standards and measurement tools to allow companies to communicate their actions and performances (Kozlowski et al., 2015). A common base for standards' formation and implementation is the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), defined by the European Commission (2011) as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society", which has grown in importance in the fast fashion sector, since it addresses the integration of environmental concerns into the companies' business strategies and operations in addition to following the laws. CSR statements reflect the current state of practice in addition to aspirations for a possibly better future state of the company. (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017). However, according to White et al. (2017), adopting the CSR initiatives in the fast fashion industry is challenging, partly due to the low-priced outsourcing to developing countries due to the business strategy.

Some fast fashion companies have started reporting and changing their activities to a sustainable direction in order to improve their reputation (Turker and Altuntas, 2014). McNeill and Moore (2015) have observed that examples of this are the utilization of more sustainable fibers, and the encouragement for recycling used garments. However, sustainability reporting may be criticized by being greenwashing, a concept of marketing related to environmentally and socially friendly images (Karliner, 2001), when the gap between the reporting and marketing

activities and actual actions is substantial (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017). Since the fast fashion business model requires often complicated supply chains and low costs in the manufacturing process, it is very difficult for companies to follow and ensure sustainable standards of the practices through each step along the way, from the production of material to shipping of the final product to stores, while still being able to operate the highly competitive fast fashion business model in a financially profitable manner (Turker and Altuntas, 2014; Garcia-Torres et al., 2017).

### 2.3.2. Possibilities for a More Environmentally Sustainable Business Model

In order for people and the environment to co-exist in a healthy manner the environment need to be able to regenerate (Jung and Jin, 2014). It is necessary for the fast fashion business model to change their operations to a direction in where raw materials are allowed to grow naturally, which is achieved by a lower speed production and by avoiding the exploitation of natural resources (Fletcher, 2010). Fletcher (2010) first introduced the 'slow fashion' movement, which has the target of shifting consumers' mindsets from quantity to quality and encourage them to purchase items with higher price less often. Incorporating aspects from the 'slow fashion' movement to the fast fashion model, would lead to clothing being produced slower and in smaller batches and lead to the reduced use of harmful resources as well as less fashion waste, which would be environmentally more sustainable (Jung and Jin, 2014).

The use of more environmentally sustainable fibers, such as lyocell, will be an increasingly important factor in minimizing the environmental degradation caused by the fast fashion industry (Bick et al., 2018). In addition, the more designs are created to be worn throughout the changing fashion trends, instead of influenced by one, the longer the clothing can be worn without been seen as 'untrendy' and even fulfill more of a personal identity compared to the fast-changing trends (Niinimäki, 2011). Bly, Gwozdz and Reisch (2015) support this point by arguing that sustainable clothing can solidify values such as individuality. Adding to this, keeping versatility in mind during the design process promotes sustainability, since the clothing can be worn in several ways and more often in different occasions (LeBlanc, 2012).

Currently, the fair trade and eco-friendly textile markets remain small next to the fast fashion industry, due to the more expensive and complex supply chains in comparison (Bick et al., 2018). In order to encourage more sustainably produced clothing in an effective manner is to promote and lobby higher requirements for environmental health through trade policies and regulations, not only within a country's borders. As an example, a high-income country could increase the import taxes in addition to determining maximum amounts of garments that can be imported annually as well as low- and middle-income countries should regulate the import of used clothing (McNeill and Moore, 2015; Bick et al., 2018). Bick et al. (2018) also highlight that some low- and middle-income countries, such as Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, have started to regulate the import of secondhand clothing by raising taxes on the used clothing as well as offering incentives to the local manufacturers.

Proper recycling and the use of circular production model in the garment industry can help lower textile waste substantially. In the circular production model, the end product can be entirely recycled and transformed to new products resulting in little to no waste. In order for consumers to recycle their used clothing, it must be made easy, effortless and widely available, since consumers are otherwise less probable to go through the trouble (Bly et al., 2015). Joung and Park-Poaps (2011) argue that the textile disposal behavior of consumers is little understood even though increasing recycling awareness is known to be important, which opens a possibility for change in the future.

### 2.3.3. Impact of Consumer Attitudes on the Future

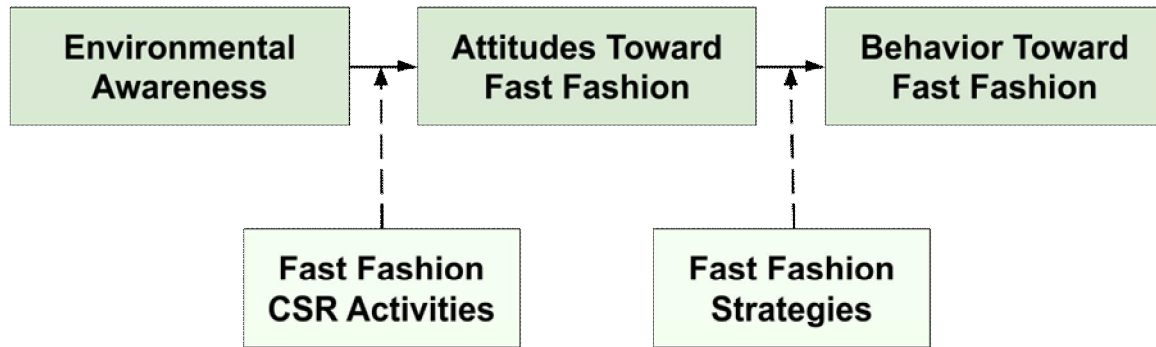
In addition to having effective trade policies and regulations in place, consumers have a large part in the change to a more sustainable direction in their attitudes and behaviors towards fast fashion companies, since supply will not change without a change in demand (McNeill and Moore, 2015; Bick et al., 2018). However, as certifications increasingly become an industry standard, greenwashing may become an issue if consumers are not critical and aware of a company's actual environmental practices (Lyon, 2015).

Birtwistle and Moore (2007) described that consumers have a lower probability in purchasing environmentally sustainable garments than fast fashion products. This is why a key in changing the operational model of the fast fashion industry is the change in consumers attitudes towards the garment industry and shifting the idea from 'more for less' to 'less is more' and purchase high quality clothing in small quantities that last and are worn longer (Bick et al., 2018). In addition, adopting behavior such as using their existing garments more, shopping used clothing, repairing owned clothing and supporting retailers with environmentally sustainable business models and transparent supply chains is important (Bick et al., 2018). Further supporting these changes in consumers' minds are projects such as the Uniform Project launched by Sheena Matheiken in 2009, in which she wore a single black dress every day for a year, to prove that a single garment can be worn in several unique ways (Jung and Jin, 2014). McNeill and Moore (2015) believe that the state in which the fast fashion industry is now and the growing concerns for the environment support the platform for consumer attitude and behavior changes.

Nowadays, consumers are presented with excessive amounts of information regarding sustainable choices, possibly consisting of conflicting nature, that may lead to information overload making the consumer confused or unable to act (Kozinets, 2010). This may explain why consumers have been unwilling to change their consumption choices to a sustainable direction (McNeill and Moore, 2015). Adding to this, sustainable fashion can be seen by consumers as vaguely defined, lacking clear industry notions of sustainability, which may result in making them skeptical or overwhelmed by the different sustainable possibilities (Bly et al., 2015). These issues must be overcome by clear and simple information in order for consumers to be able to drive the change to a more sustainable direction.

## 2.4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework below is constructed on the basis of the preceding literature review. The following study to be conducted has a foundation on the conceptual framework below, which displays the relationship between attitudes and behavior toward the fast fashion industry, as well as environmental awareness and some factors affecting the relationships.



*Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the relationships between environmental awareness as well as attitudes and behavior toward fast fashion.*

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this section is to explain the research methodology used for this study. The forms of research used to conduct this study are both primary and secondary. This primary research is the main focus of this section, which has its base in the secondary research previously conducted in the form of the literary review. The design of the primary qualitative research is explored in addition to the sampling methods, data and thematic analyses which are discussed. To conclude, the limitations of this methodology are analyzed.

#### 3.1. Secondary Research

The secondary data used in this research was in the form of the literature review, which studies prior research regarding the research objectives constructed for this thesis. The literature review provides with answers to the research objectives 1 and 6, as well as introducing research achievements to date in order to provide guidance and support future research regarding the research objectives 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8. The secondary research together with the primary research conducted will provide to the complete analyses of the research objectives.

#### 3.2. Primary Research

The main objective for the primary research is to find out what consumers know about the environmental impact of the fast fashion industry currently and study consumer attitudes toward the fast fashion industry. In addition, the connections and possible gaps between environmental awareness, attitudes and behavior toward the fast fashion industry are studied. In order to reach the objectives, a qualitative interview is conducted in the form of a focus group. The following section will further discuss the methodology of the primary research.

### 3.2.1. Method and Design

A focus group is often defined in a similar manner as a “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger and Casey, 2000). The interview was chosen to be held in a focus group, since the method will not only provoke open ended responses but will enhance group discussion and analyses. When it comes to a person’s decision making and its development, the link between the perceptions of people surrounding them is critical (Berkes, 2004). Thus, this method is beneficial in order to discover how individuals think and form attitudes in a group, providing this research with a more social and in-depth insights of the topic. As purchasing habits and attitudes towards fast fashion is not dependent only on an individual’s isolated thought process, conducting a focus group is a suitable method to research how awareness and attitudes spread concerning this topic, opposed to an individual interview.

In order to conduct the focus groups, a framework by Krueger (2002) was utilized, due to its proven usefulness by both students and researchers (Rabiee, 2004). Several elements from Krueger’s (2002) framework will be implemented in the focus group discussion in order to provoke a good and enriching environment for the participants.

Krueger (2002) suggests having a focus group consist of carefully selected five to ten people, thus I chose a sample size of eight people with important connecting features in order to have an advisable amount of people interacting together. Also, it



is a good number of people in order to provoke effortless interaction. The elements of the focus group environment where also be carefully planned as Krueger (2002) suggests, by having comfortable surroundings, seating the participants in a circle and having the moderator use a tape recorder.

The focus group interview questions were built with the base knowledge gathered from the secondary research and with the expected reactions the questions would provoke in mind. However, the interview was semi-structured to an extent in order to ensure a good and smooth conversation which fulfilled the main objectives of the interview. Also, it is impossible to fully predict how the participants will respond; thus, it was important to be flexible and modify the questions in the focus group session. The moderator was careful not to communicate any own opinions verbally or nonverbally, as the task of the moderator was to stay neutral. Questions also where asked in an informal and easily understandable way, to encourage relaxed conversation.

A brief exercise, consisting of image grouping, was also conducted by the participants following a set of questions. In addition, the moderator provided the participants with some bits of information in discussion form, as well as with infographics. Prior to the focus group, the age, gender and nationality of the participants where collected in order to have the main demographic details listed before the session. The focus group guide, including the questions asked, is listed in Appendix 1.

### 3.2.2. Sampling and Data Collection

The eight participants for the focus group where chosen by convenience sampling and with the help of some defining characteristics. Convenience sampling meets certain criteria, such as easy accessibility and availability at a given time (Etikan, 2016), which made it the most practical choice for the sample collection in this study. All of the collected participants where students at the university the focus group was conducted in and the selecting criteria was made known for the participants. The participants where all fast fashion consumers, which was ensured prior to recruiting them by asking whether they purchase from fast fashion brands at least once a

month on average. To make sure the participant understood the question, a list of different fast fashion brands was presented to them in addition to a brief definition of what fast fashion is. The definition used was later repeated in the focus group session and can be found from Appendix 1. In the table 1, the demographic details of the participants for the focus group are listed.

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Nationality</b>
1	20	Female	Finnish
2	23	Male	Finnish
3	21	Male	Finnish
4	21	Female	Finnish
5	21	Male	Finnish
6	22	Male	Finnish
7	22	Male	Finnish
8	21	Male	Finnish

*Table 1: Demographic details of focus group participants*

The focus group consisted of people who are on average more conscious about the environmental effects of the fast fashion industry. The demographic of having Finnish university students attending is mainly the reason for this, since Finland is a fairly conscious country regarding these matters and students are well educated. However, the participants did admit to purchasing fast fashion every now and then, thus they were interviewed for their attitudes toward it. This focus group was conducted on Monday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2020 in the afternoon at 13pm.

### 3.2.3. Ethics

The participation for the focus group interviews were entirely voluntary, which was made clear in the recruiting process, as well as in the beginning of the interviews. All participants were informed of the nature in which their answers will be used and understood what information would be recorded. All identities of the participants are kept anonymous in this study, thus all participants attending the same focus group signed a non-disclosure agreement ensuring the anonymity of their and their co-

participants responses. This aspect was also informed to the participants prior to this interview. All of the collected data was solely used for academic purposes.

#### 3.2.4. Data Analysis

Due to the nature of the study being qualitative, the analysis has a focus on the attitudes and opinions of the participants. The analysis for a qualitative study does not concentrate on bringing the ultimate truth or a yes/no answer as a quantitative study would, but instead in bringing deeper meaning to a situation (Rabiee, 2004). In order to analyze the primary data in an appropriate way, the analysis must reach the research objectives regarding consumer attitudes and thoughts. The manner this was executed was through thematic analysis, which assisted in finding the repeating themes and attitudes about the topic discussed. In the following section, thematic analysis and its applicability to this research is discussed.

#### 3.2.5. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used and a flexible method in analyzing qualitative data, especially fitting to the data collected from focus groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joffe, 2012). The method assists the researcher to find repetitive patterns and shared attitudes in order to make sense of them. As the qualitative data often does not have one right answer, the freedom provided by the thematic analysis method for the researcher is beneficial in the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis process which describes how the findings were made must be clearly laid out, in order to make sure it has a clear objective which is reached in a reasonable manner. The specific information regarding the thematic analysis process for this study is presented below.

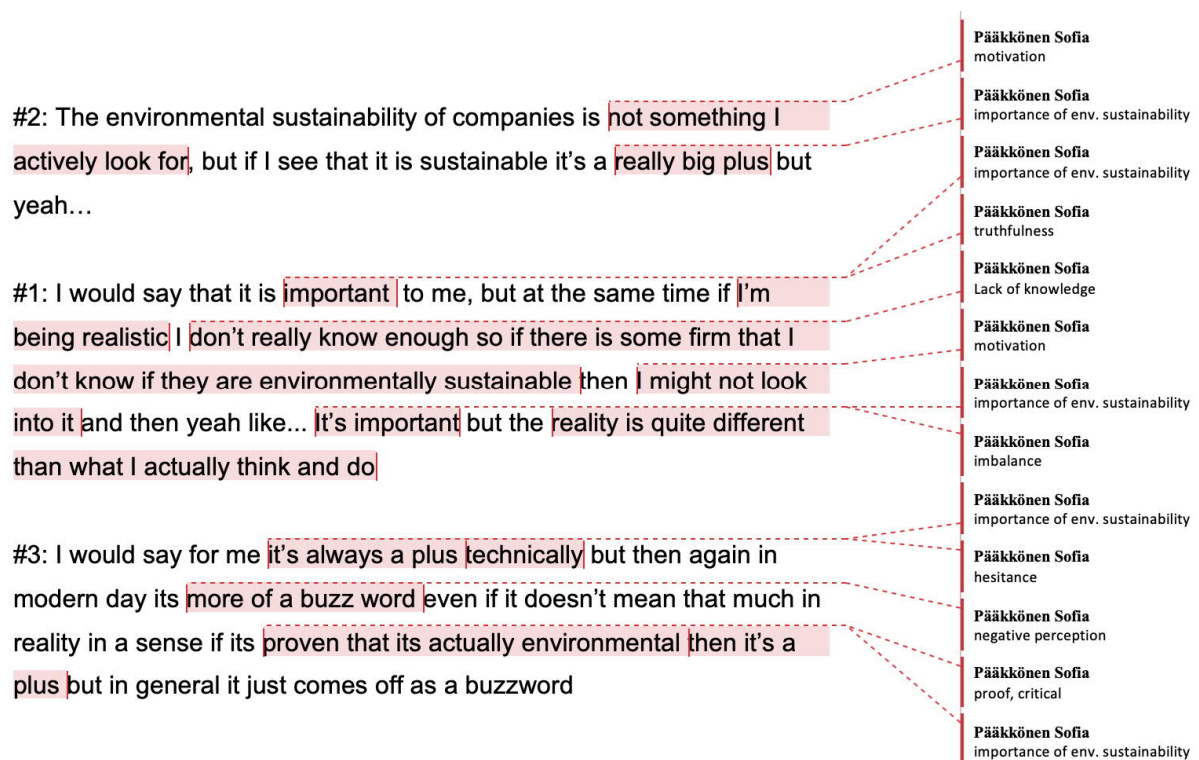
Thematic analysis helps with finding patterns in large bodies of text, which are translated into themes. The aim is to find the most crucial themes within the transcript, which recur multiple times and help with answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are two contents, manifest and latent, on which themes may be based on. The first, manifest content, is explicit information consisting mostly of the statements by the participants. The second, latent content, is

on the contrary more implicit information drawn by the analyst from the collected data (Joffe, 2012). The thematic analysis method used for this research was conducted by the use of the six phases created by Braun and Clarke (2006) in order to have a recognized guide throughout the process (Joffe, 2012). Below, in the table 2, the six followed phases are summarized by Braun and Clarke (2006). To ensure the phases were followed accordingly, a 15-point checklist created by Braun and Clarke (2006) was utilized (Appendix 2).

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the process</b>
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

*Table 2: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87)*

Following the first phase suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), a transcript was created from the recorded focus group conversation. The transcribing was conducted on the same day of the focus group, in order to have the conversation fresh in mind and as Krueger (2002) suggests being beneficial in his framework. In order to identify initial themes from the transcript, it was read several times consecutively. To start the physical coding process, the interesting and useful statements and comments regarding the research objectives were highlighted with brief notes (Excerpt 1).



### *Excerpt 1: Initial coding of the focus group transcript*

In order to look for relevant, prominent and reoccurring themes, the initial coding was carefully examined. Following this, the four most dominant themes were discovered from the codes. They are the importance of environmental sustainability, perception of fast fashion strategies, perception of CSR initiatives and attitude-behavior disconnection. Each theme was assigned to a different color, which are indicated below. The codes relating to the particular theme were highlighted with the color assigned to its theme (Excerpt 2). The themes identified here, will be more extensively discussed and analyzed in the findings section of this thesis.

1. Importance of Environmental Sustainability
2. Perception of Fast Fashion Strategies
3. Perception of Fast Fashion CSR Initiatives
4. Attitude-Behavior Disconnection

#2: The environmental sustainability of companies is not something I actively look for, but **if I see that it is sustainable it's a really big plus** but yeah...

#1: I would say that **it is important to me**, but at the same time if I'm being realistic **I don't really know enough so if there is some firm that I don't know if they are environmentally sustainable then I might not look into it and then yeah like... It's important** but **the reality is quite different than what I actually think and do**

#3: I would say for me **it's always a plus** technically but then again in modern day its more of a buzz word even if it doesn't mean that much in reality in a sense **if its proven that its actually environmental then it's a plus** but in general it just comes off as a buzzword

Pääkkönen Sofia	motivation
Pääkkönen Sofia	importance of env. sustainability
Pääkkönen Sofia	importance of env. sustainability
Pääkkönen Sofia	truthfulness
Pääkkönen Sofia	Lack of knowledge
Pääkkönen Sofia	motivation
Pääkkönen Sofia	importance of env. sustainability
Pääkkönen Sofia	imbalance
Pääkkönen Sofia	importance of env. sustainability
Pääkkönen Sofia	hesitance
Pääkkönen Sofia	negative perception
Pääkkönen Sofia	proof, critical
Pääkkönen Sofia	importance of env. sustainability

*Excerpt 2: Themes found in the transcript highlighted with the colors assigned to them*

### 3.2.6. Limitations of Methodology

There were a couple of limitations for this methodology used in the study. The Krueger's (2002) framework which was utilized in this focus group study was not fully followed, which may affect the results and quality of the data collected. Since this thesis is an individual paper, the recommendation of using two people responsible for the focus group instead of one was not utilized. The framework also suggests that the data should be interpreted by the two people responsible, in the manner that the secondary moderator would check the analysis made by the main moderator. Since only one person analyzed the data, it is possible that some misinterpretations occurred. In addition to this, the focus groups where not repeated with a different set of participants, which may be a limitation in the terms of a lack of knowledge in whether data saturation across different groups is reached.

Another limitation in a focus group is that the relatively small sample cannot represent the attitudes and opinions of the general population (Masadeh, 2012). In addition, there was a possibility for peer pressure to be present despite trying to

minimize the possibility by planning an open and comfortable space to discuss. Also, since the focus group was executed face-to-face, the probability for a participant to express thoughts they think may not be well received was lower. Thus, it was important to plan the discussion to be as little inculpatory as possible. In addition, the moderator must stay neutral throughout the interview, therefore, if the moderator subliminally expresses own opinions through verbal or nonverbal methods, the research has a limitation.

Despite of all of the participants being fluent in English, their native language was Finnish, resulting in a couple of moments the person had to think about how they should formulate what they are saying. This did not bring noticeable issues to the focus group discussion, yet it is still worth mentioning, since it might have made it less comfortable for some of the participants to express themselves. All in all, limitations of the methodology were attempted to minimize throughout the focus group and analyzing process.

#### 4. FINDINGS

The following section of this thesis will discuss the findings made from the conducted focus group. The prominent themes found from the transcript and introduced in the previous section will be discussed and further analyzed.

Overall, the attitudes of the participants toward the fast fashion industry were on the negative side, since they were fairly knowledgeable about the surrounding issues and environmental sustainability was found to be an important value for them. However, the attitudes of the focus group did not affect their behavior toward fast fashion much and there seemed to be a disconnection. These relationships were mostly due to the perceptions the participants had toward fast fashion strategies and CSR initiatives.

##### 4.1. Theme 1: Importance of Environmental Sustainability

One of the first themes that stood out from the discussions of the focus group participants was the importance of the environment and environmental sustainability for them. All of the participants agreed that the environment is important to them, at least to a meaningful extent. As the discussion of environmental sustainability begun, the collective opinion of the participants regarding the importance for companies to be environmentally sustainable was quickly made clear from the conversation. These aspects can be also seen from the following statements:

I don't spend really that much time out to be honest, but still it's important that we have a nice environment. Like if there would be trash everywhere or plant would be dead, or we wouldn't have forests it would be depressing. (Participant #3).

Overall it is the sensible thing to do for a company to be environmentally friendly. It's the humane thing to do, we are still people, so you want to do good (Participant #7).

Also, it was brought up that in order for our world to stay a good place to live in the future, it is vital to place weight on the importance of environmental sustainability. This was laid out with the following comment:

This wonderful ball we live on will not survive if we continue that's one of the big things, I want to live long and my children to live longer and have a good nature (Participant #5).

The participants were knowledgeable to an extent of the environmental issues the fast fashion industry is responsible for. In the discussions, issues such as pollution from the manufacturing, textile waste and the unsustainability of some materials used were brought up. These issues were seen as a problem and a reason not to support the industry, since it was seen as being environmentally unsustainable.

There is so much waste generated from the fast fashion industry, and not just like from the stuff we buy but also the stuff we don't buy and the



manufacturing and stuff... It is not sustainable on the long run at all and it's really bad for the environment. We should not support it (Participant #2).

In addition, most participants agreed that the use of environmental sustainability in a company's image is currently more of a norm than a rarity, however, the opinion was mainly that it is a positive thing. Participant #8 highlighted that it is good if environmental sustainability is a standard for companies. Even though the matter of greenwashing and the use of environmental sustainability as a buzzword is brought up in the later themes, the collective thought of the participants was that even small changes for the better are important and that probably companies do change their operations to an extent if they use it in their campaigns or marketing. Participant #4 also brought up that it has been estimated that the only way to be successful in the future is to be environmentally sustainable, thus companies sooner or later will probably shift to that direction. Overall, environmental sustainability was an important value for the group as a whole, and many believed that it is vital in order for a good future.

#### 4.2. Theme 2: Perception of Fast Fashion Strategies

The perception of strategies fast fashion brands implement toward their clients were brought up frequently, as they affected the participants attitudes and behavior toward fast fashion. One of the first factors to surface was the increase in fast fashion purchasing of some interviewees when travelling. Even though these participants said that they try not to purchase fast fashion too much, they did not have the same restriction when travelling. One of the reasons was the easy accessibility of fast fashion stores abroad. This fast fashion company strategy of being widely accessible globally and the effects of it in the consumer perception can be found in the following statement.

Well, overall, all these brands that you showed us, I think one of the, what brings them all together is that when I'm travelling, I purchase a lot of these but at home I won't that much... Like when I'm in Stockholm I shop like Uniqlo. In Finland I know the market very well like where to find what I'm looking for but when I'm abroad -everyone wants to shop abroad for some reason and

you don't know any places, and these are the brands you see in the city center (Participant #7).

Another point to be brought up is the perception toward a brand and the brand recognition resulting from fast fashion strategies. The real need for a necessary garment, leads to the purchase of that piece from a specific brand that first comes to mind. This applies also for the need of a piece that will be used for a specific purpose rarely as mentioned below.

I recognize Uniqlo, I have my new coat from there, but then again, I needed a new coat, so I needed a new one... I also often buy things I really won't need that much from fast fashion, like theme costumes (Participant #8).

I usually buy things I need from brands I recognize, it's easier cause I know pretty much what I'm getting, like H&M (Participant #4).

However, one of the most highlighted strategies used by fast fashion brands was the low pricing and target they have toward low income clients. It was mentioned, that a portion of the population need cheap clothing, since lower income people are not able to afford more expensive garments. Therefore, the participants perceived it as one acceptable factor for purchasing fast fashion. Also, all of the participants were students, thus they do not have an income to spend on expensive clothing. This was used as one factor to explain fast fashion purchasing. A couple of comments presenting these points are found below.

In general, around the world where living standards are not high it's a necessity, they need cheap clothes so they can't afford to think of environment, but in richer countries it should be addressed (Participant #3)

If I had more money, I would buy more sustainable clothes but I'm a student so (Participant #4).

As the conversation progressed and other cheap alternatives were discussed, it was brought up that more sustainable choices are often less convenient, thus need more

work and motivation to shop for. This ease of purchasing is another strategy used by fast fashion companies. To give an example of similar prized alternatives, flea markets do not always offer the garment you currently are looking for in the right size.

Well there is room for improvement, like if you go to the flea market you can find items for cheaper, but it needs more effort and trouble... I guess when you have research done its easier but fast fashion is easy (Participant #1).

#### 4.3. Theme 3: Perception of Fast Fashion CSR Initiatives

Another theme to be often found in the transcripts was the perception the participants had toward the environmental sustainability and CSR initiatives within Fast Fashion companies. As previously discussed, environmental sustainability was important for the participants. However, as Participant #3 brought up, the term sometimes comes off as a buzzword and does not have much meaning to it. The focus group also discussed that the term is somewhat overused by companies.

I would say for me it's always a plus technically but then again in modern day its more of a buzz word even if it doesn't mean that much in reality in a sense if its proven that its actually environmental then it's a plus but in general it just comes off as a buzzword (Participant #3).

I think it has become like as a term overused that if they are really doing it that's an investment that they get PR because of those reasons and activity for the future but I agree that the term is a bit overused (Participant #8).

Also, the reporting activities and campaigns of companies known to be environmentally harmful where not much trusted amongst the focus group. Participant #1 noted that negative news' are much easier to believe, and it is hard to trust sustainable campaigns that fast fashion brands come out with. This was mostly for the reason that the participant believed it is all done for marketing and the company can hide the negative aspects to the extent of their liking. Participant #4 supported this by saying that this sort of action is greenwashing.

#### 4.4. Theme 4: Attitude-Behavior Disconnection

The last prominent theme was the disconnection the participants had with their values or attitudes and their behavior. As previously was mentioned, environmental sustainability was a prominent theme throughout the focus group, since it was an important value for the participants. However, it was later discussed how there seems to be a disconnection of what one wants to think they would do and what one actually does. When talking about the environmental sustainability of companies, the following statement was made.

I would say that it is important to me, but at the same time if I'm being realistic I don't really know enough so if there is some firm that I don't know if they are environmentally sustainable then I might not look into it and then yeah like.. It's important but the reality is quite different than what I actually think and do (Participant #1).

Later, when the environmental effects of the fast fashion industry had been brought up, several participants commented on being aware of the issues, however, they thought about it very rarely. In addition, Participant #1 described how the awareness and knowledge do not seem to change her behavior and additionally described a situation when impulsive shopping took over her due to the trendy piece found.

It's almost like I know all these things inherently, but I don't think about it when I do shopping. Every now and then it's reminding me what is happening behind the scenes (Participant #6).

Honestly, I would describe my fast fashion purchasing habits as being awful... You know I would want to think that I am aware of all the bad things and I guess I am but there are some things about them that are not going through... cause now that I'm thinking every single thing that I am now wearing is fast fashion, even my earrings... So yeah. It's kind of distressing to realize things like this... For example, these pants I'm wearing (white pants), I'm not a very impulsive shopper, but then again, I went to the store and needed black pants

and saw these and thought well spring is coming, why not buy these they are nice (Participant #1).

When looking for reasoning for these disconnections, the participants brought up that since most people do not see the horrible things happening in reality in the garment industry, it is easy not to think about them. In addition, a popular opinion was that since the problems in the garment industry are so large, an individual cannot change them.

One of the biggest things is that even though we are aware of these things, we don't see the bad things in real life, they don't affect us directly, we are human beings, it's really easy to just not think (Participant #4).

Adding to that point it's the scale of the thing, that we don't think an individual can change anything (Participant #6).

## 5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The following section will discuss and analyze the findings identified previously. By utilizing the previous research from the literature review in section 2, the relevance and connection of the findings for this study will be further looked into.

### 5.1. Assessment of the Connection Between Environmental Awareness and Attitudes Toward Fast Fashion

Importance of environmental sustainability as a theme was rather prominent in the focus group discussion, and it seemed to be an area of interest many saw as being important concerning company practices in general as well as fast fashion companies' practices. This supports the statement made by McNeill and Moore (2015) previously regarding the increased interest consumers have for the unethical practices of the fast fashion industry. Also, the increased interest was seen from the

knowledge the participants had gained regarding the environmental issues of the fast fashion industry.

However, several aspects override the value the participants placed on environmental sustainability of fast fashion companies, such as the perceptions consumer had of fast fashion CSR initiatives. Collectively it was agreed that there are several issues in the industry, that should not be supported in order to strengthen environmental sustainability across companies, which was seen as being important and vital for the world to stay a good living space. However, there was a gap between participants' environmental awareness and their attitudes and behavior toward fast fashion. This brings out interesting aspects regarding consumer mindsets regarding their values, attitudes and behavior, especially since it is known that all participants do purchase fast fashion at least monthly regardless of their opinions on environmental sustainability.

One possible reason for this gap between environmental awareness and attitudes toward fast fashion are the negative connotations consumers have toward the CSR initiatives companies are increasingly taking. Fast fashion companies are sustainability reporting and marketing more, which is also why there may be an increased amount in knowledge within the focus group and consumers in general. Environmental sustainability is talked more across several public channels than it has been before, which is also mentioned by Turker and Altuntas (2014). A reason for these negative connotations' consumers have are due to the broadly advertised environmental sustainability practices.

It was discussed that environmental sustainability reporting was seen as a PR stunt at times. This is not far-fetched, since companies do use environmental sustainability as a strategy in order to compete of the increasingly aware consumers (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2011). Environmental sustainability reporting is also very widely spread, since the term seems to be overused according to the focus group. These sustainable campaigns unsustainable companies come out with were seen as untrustworthy and 'greenwashing' by the participants. However, it is good that consumers are more critical than gullible regarding these matters, since

greenwashing can be an issue if consumers are not aware of the actual practices of a company (Lyon, 2015).

The negative connotations toward the CSR activities of fast fashion companies' consumers have gained are mainly through the overuse and wrongful use of environmental sustainability. This may be one reason why environmentally sustainable companies are increasingly difficult to find and support, since consumers most likely become overwhelmed from the information circling the topic. Kozinets (2010) supports this conclusion by stating that the excessive and confusing information regarding sustainable choices leads to consumers not behaving in a sustainable manner. This probably leads to the thought process of accepting fast fashion purchasing as other options are too overwhelming and difficult to search for, even though the consumer would have high environmental awareness. McNeill and Moore (2015) also suggest that this information overload leads to consumers not being willing to change their consuming habits for the better.

## 5.2. Assessment of the Attitude-Behavior Disconnection

Disconnection could be observed throughout the conversations regarding the attitudes and behavior of the participants. The participants were conscious about environmental sustainability and saw it as an important value, however, this did not translate to their actions, since fast fashion was purchased despite having knowledge about some environmental issues resulting from the industry. From this, it can be suggested that the focus group consisted mainly of the second group of consumers introduced by McNeill and Moore (2015), who value sustainable options but do not act accordingly. It was brought up in the discussions how it is easy not to think about the issues when shopping, which does bring out the disconnection there is between attitudes and behavior. In the study by Bly et al. (2015) this is supported, since it was suggested that the concerns toward sustainability do not have a large part in the decision-making process when purchasing fast fashion items.

One factor that further contributes to the disconnection of attitudes and actions is the impulsive nature fast fashion shopping often is. Even though the consumers would be aware of the unsustainable nature of the garments, it is not thought about when

an impulsive purchase choice is made. Since the garments are fashionable and inexpensive, consumers often make the purchase choice fast and in an impulsive manner (Cachon and Swinney, 2011; Cook and Yurchisin, 2017). Thus, the attitudes do not translate to the behavior due to the positive response towards the fast fashion strategy of delivering trendy designs faster than others. A reasoning for this, that was not suggested in the literature review, was the scale of issues being so large that an average consumer does not believe they can change anything as well as the simple fact that most do not see the issues in reality. This extends the insight into why the focus group do not fully behave in line with their attitudes regarding fast fashion.

Several other aspects that added to the attitude-behavior disconnection and made fast fashion purchasing seem more acceptable in the opinion of the focus group where the perceptions they had toward fast fashion strategies. One being the high availability and accessibility of fast fashion stores in the city centers where tourists often visit. Cook and Yurchisin (2017) highlighted that high availability of fast fashion is one reason for purchasing it. Following this, the brand recognition of a fast fashion brand is a high incentive for consumers to purchase them, not only for a true need but also for the items to be worn once. Thus, these have strong impacts in a consumer purchase decision making than environmental awareness or attitudes toward fast fashion.

In addition, the low prices of fast fashion items were discussed to be vital for some, for example students and low-income population, who cannot afford higher priced clothing. Cook and Yurchisin (2017) brought up as well that fast fashion can be purchased by almost anyone, not excluding the low-income population. Overall, consumers see the low prices of fast fashion garments to be a large reason for adding value on purchasing them (Gabrielli et al., 2013). However, some participants in the focus group did mention that if they had more money, they would favor more sustainable clothing, but the situation they are currently in financially does not support them to follow their values regarding garment purchasing to a meaningful extent.

Fast fashion is seen as being one the easiest option for purchasing clothing according to the findings from the discussion. This fast fashion strategy is effective in



affecting the gap between attitudes and behavior, since more sustainable options, especially at the same price points, were seen as needing more effort and research. Flea markets were used as an example, which Bick et al. (2018) see as one step for a more sustainable future. This is something that should be focused on, whether consumers are wanted to make a choice for more sustainable direction.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The following concluding section of this thesis presents the main findings of the study as well as discusses the implications for international business and suggestions for future research regarding the topic of this paper.

### 6.1. Main Findings

The main findings of this thesis consist of the answers for the research questions discussed in the introduction section. The environmental challenges throughout the supply chain of the fast fashion industry currently were researched and discussed in the literature review. The main challenges to be brought up include the issues regarding the resources used to produce the raw materials, the toxic dyes and finishes used to manufacture fabrics, as well as the use of unsustainable materials for the garments. The disposal of the textiles is also a large issue consisting of the consumer disposal behavior as well as the industry textile waste. Packaging, transporting, and aftercare of the items also are responsible for environmental harm.

The consumer attitudes toward the fast fashion industry, which were found to be mostly negative, were studied through primary and secondary research. The connections between environmental awareness, consumer attitudes and behavior toward fast fashion were found out to have some affecting qualities, which were depicted on the conceptual framework (figure 1). The perceptions consumers have toward fast fashion CSR initiatives and reporting affected the connection between the environmental awareness and attitudes toward fast fashion, mostly due to

information overload and consumers being overwhelmed by the reporting. Also, the perception toward fast fashion strategies, such as low pricing and trendy designs, affected and led to the attitude-behavior disconnection toward fast fashion. These findings were supported by the primary research conducted through a focus group suggesting that the overall consumer attitudes were not favorable toward the fast fashion industry if knowledge about the issues had been gained. However, the attitudes did not translate to behavior.

Regarding a more sustainable future for the fast fashion market, the options were researched and discussed in the literary review in addition to analyzing the consumer attitudes that may affect the change. Several recommendations the market could implement were found, such as reducing textile waste and resource consumption in addition to using recycled and environmentally friendly materials to manufacture garments. The utilization of the circular production model would be beneficial. Consumer culture regarding clothing consumption should also be affected to an extent that purchasing behaviors decrease and the lifecycle of the garments become longer. Also, trade policies and regulations could have a significant effect on the industry to a more sustainable direction. Finally, companies should take more honest and transparent initiatives toward environmental sustainability in their operations, in order to build consumer trust and true changes for the better.

## 6.2. Implications for International Business

Some findings from this study may be used to carry implications for international business. Since consumers are becoming more aware of the environmentally unsustainable aspects of the global fast fashion industry as well as the greenwashing and false marketing some companies are responsible for, it can be beneficial for companies to win over the trust of consumers by making large changes for the better. Also, showing consumers the benefits and making clear, honest and transparent reporting may lead to a win-win situation where companies can find consumer who value these aspects and consumers may further push and trust the global companies to change their practices to an environmentally sustainable direction.

In addition, since the fast fashion industry is very globalized and has supply chains moving across countries, it is useful to understand the benefits and disadvantages of it and how to change operations for the better, without compromising ethical values for example regarding environmental sustainability. Also, working with countries that have different cultures, circumstances and materials, requires knowledge of these aspects and respect towards them. To conclude, the more global the industry, the more research and effort needs to be made on making all processes work sustainably and ethically.

### 6.3. Suggestions for Further Research

Several options for future research can be suggested in order to have a more extensive study of this topic. Firstly, it would be beneficial to have a larger number of participants and a more diverse demographic. This would help with gaining insight from different viewpoints and backgrounds and not be limited to one consumer representation, since there could be brought data from additional types of consumers introduced by the study conducted by McNeill and Moore (2015) and discussed in this paper. Secondly, to make the study more effective for discovering beneficial future implications, consumer attitudes and the behavior tied to it could be followed for a longer time frame, in order to find out correlations and possibilities to change the behavior for the better and what does it require attitude-wise. Also, a long recording time would make sure that the study is not the only reason for a change. Thirdly, details about companies' sustainability initiatives and the actual environmental impacts of them could be further looked into. Since greenwashing is one reason consumers have mistrust toward the industry, it would be good to find out the real effects the companies are responsible for regarding the environment. In addition, it would be interesting to find out how consumers could be supported into changing their attitudes to a sustainable direction along with their behavior and what would it take for the fast fashion industry to start taking large changes in their operations for the better. If there are ways consumers want to and can largely impact the fast fashion industry, the steps would be beneficial to find out.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: The Focus Group Plan and Guide

Introduction of this focus group:

The goal of this focus group is to have you think and freely discuss the topics introduced. Due to the nature of this interview, I highly encourage you to communicate and interact with each other. There are no right or wrong answers and all opinions and thoughts are valued. This interview will be recorded.

Discussion guide and questions:

1. How important is the environment to you?
2. What are your attitudes towards companies' environmental sustainability?
3. Why do you think companies' environmental sustainability to be important (or not)?

The moderator will describe the definition for Fast Fashion: Fast fashion is clothing that emphasizes making fashion trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers.

4. How would you describe your purchasing habits regarding fast fashion? How often do you shop? How much do you spend at once? Do you go alone or with friends? Why?

The moderator will lay several pictures in the middle of the table including different dimensions, such as: nice - ugly, nature - laboratory, happy - sad, young - old, down-to-earth - luxurious, fast - slow, poor- rich, exciting - boring, healthy - unhealthy, social oriented - lonely, which may or may not be associated with fast fashion and the moderator will have the focus group participants choose the images that they associate with fast fashion brands and group them together. In addition, they will be led to discuss why do the certain pictures describe the fast fashion brands. (Examples of the images used: a catwalk model, a plastic bottle, an old woman and a green forest.)

5. What do you think about fast fashion?
6. Why do you have this opinion?
7. How do you gain information regarding fast fashion companies' and/or their practices?
8. How trustworthy do you see this information to be through these channels?
9. What do you know about the environmental effects the fast fashion industry is responsible for?
10. Do the environmental effects of fast fashion affect the way you think? Why is this?

The moderator goes back to the images that have been previously grouped and discusses them, especially the ones connected to the environment and highlights the link with the fast fashion related images – if they have not already been linked. The moderator will also provide the group with printed infographics (Appendix 3) that include statistics of the environmental toll the garment industry is responsible for, in order to show the true environmental issues of the industry.

11. What do you believe are the issues with our consuming habits concerning fast fashion?
12. Why the environmental issues of the fast fashion industry do not affect consumers attitudes?
13. Why is there an inconsistency with possible awareness and actions?
14. \* Why should we change our consuming habits towards fast fashion?
15. What sustainable changes can the fast fashion industry implement in order to affect our attitudes and possibly behavior?

*\*Asked if previous discussions have brought out that there is room for change in consuming habits.*

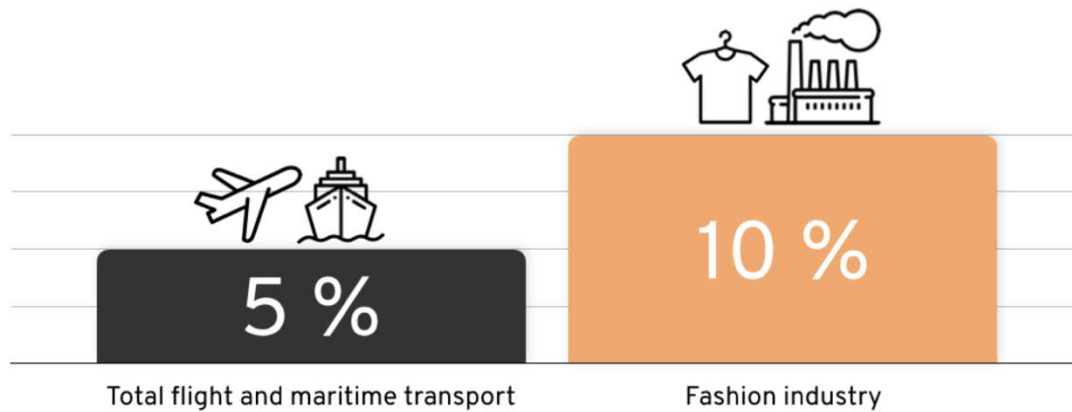
## Appendix 2: 15-point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis

<b>Process</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analyzed/interpreted, made sense of/rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other/the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written Report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis is clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done/i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

*(Braun & Clarke, 2006: 96)*

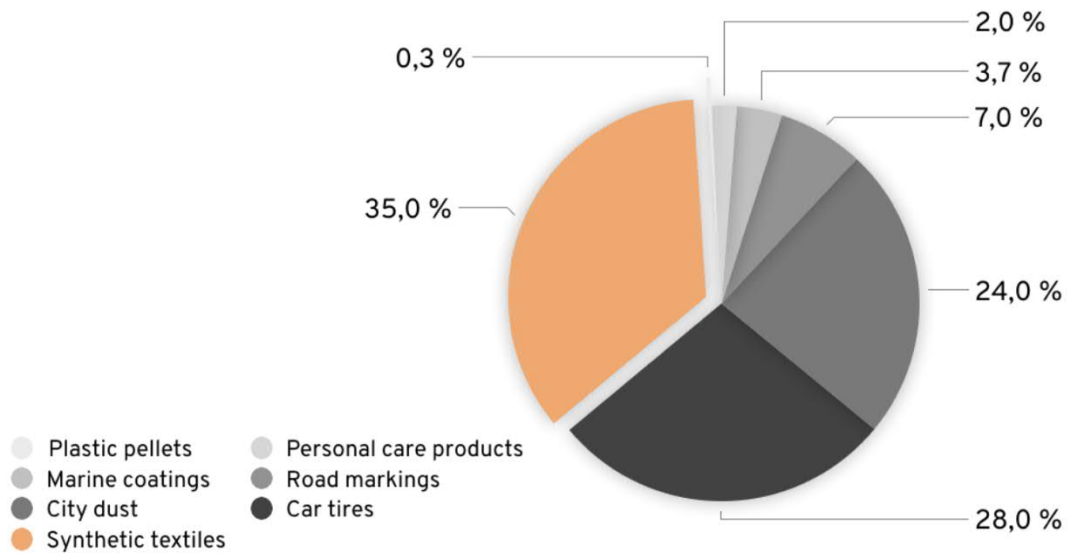
### Appendix 3: Infographics Shown to Focus Group Participants

#### CO2 consumption in comparison



Wagner, L. (2020) 'The environmental impact of the fast fashion industry.' *Sanvt* [online].

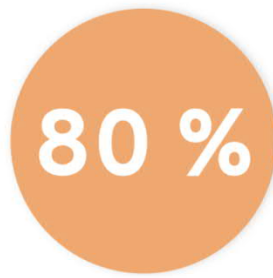
#### Percentage of microplastics in the water



Wagner, L. (2020) 'The environmental impact of the fast fashion industry.' *Sanvt* [online].

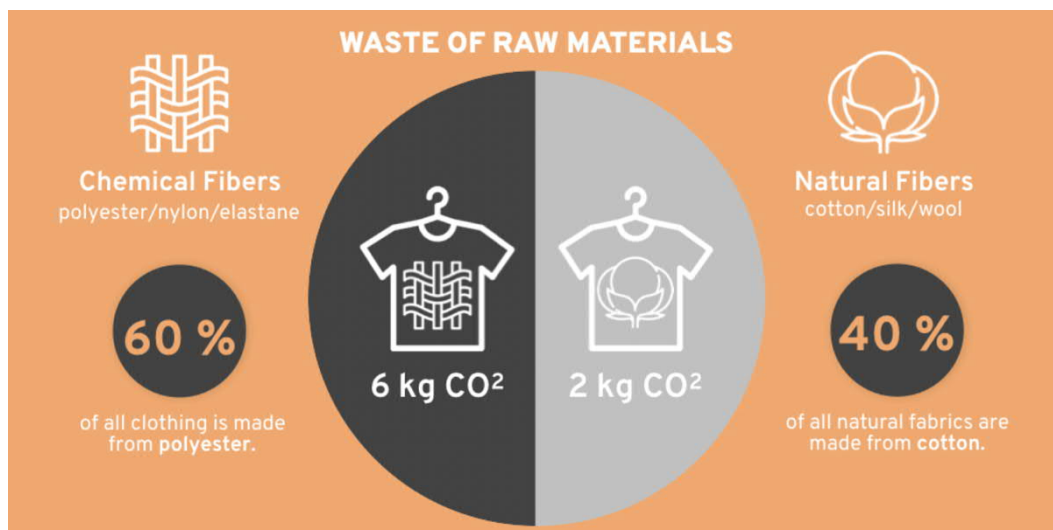


of the clothing is recycled  
into new clothing



of all clothing sold in the EU  
ends up on landfills

Wagner, L. (2020) 'The environmental impact of the fast fashion industry.' *Sanvt* [online].



Wagner, L. (2020) 'The environmental impact of the fast fashion industry.' *Sanvt* [online].

## HOW MUCH CLOTHING DO WE WASTE?



**82,782,000,000 kilograms**  
of clothing

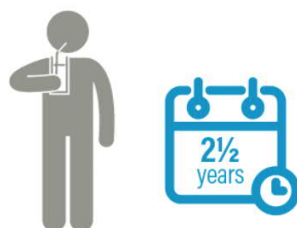
Reichart, E. and Drew, D. (2019) *By the Numbers: The Economic, Social and Environmental Impacts Of "Fast Fashion"*. Available from: <https://www.wri.org/blog/2019/01/numbers-economic-social-and-environmental-impacts-fast-fashion> [Accessed on 28 January 2020].

It Takes 2,700 Liters of Water to Make One Cotton Shirt

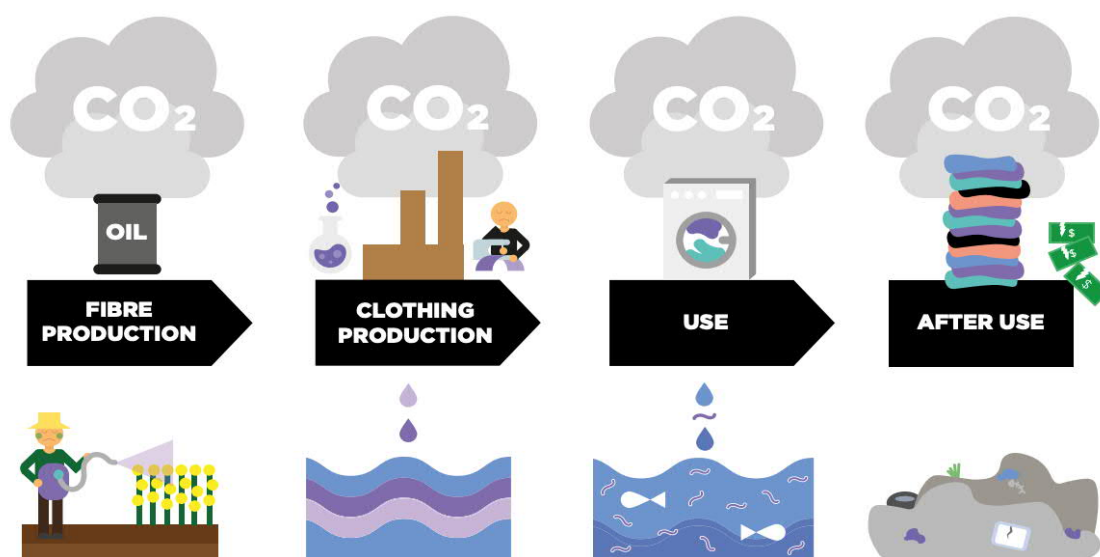


Average Consumer Bought **60%** More Clothing in 2014 Than in 2000, But Kept Each Garment Half as Long

Enough Water for One Person to Drink for 2½ Years



Drew, D. and Yehounme, G. (2017) *The Apparel Industry's Environmental Impact In 6 Graphics*. Available from: <https://www.wri.org/blog/2017/07/apparel-industrys-environmental-impact-6-graphics> [Accessed on 28 January 2020].



Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) *A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion's Future*. pp. 19

## Appendix 4: Focus Group Transcript

Date: 02.02.2020

Time: 13:00

Moderator (M): Hello everyone, it is really nice to have you here. The goal of this focus group is to have you think and freely discuss the topics introduced. Due to the nature of this interview, I highly encourage you to communicate and interact with each other. There are no right or wrong answers and all opinions and thoughts are valued. Also, this interview will be recorded. So, let's start off by how important is the environment to you?

#8: Yeah, it's important...

#1: Nature, yes, it is very important.

#3: [laughs] Sure, yes.

#7: It's very important, I like to spend a lot of time outdoors. you would not guess.

#1: Yes, me too. I love to walk around in the nature and end up spending a lot of time out.

#3: I don't spend really that much time out to be honest, but still it's important that we have a nice environment. Like if there would be trash everywhere or plant would be dead, or we wouldn't have forests it would be depressing.

#5: I agree, just simple things we kind of take for granted but the environment, especially in Finland I value a lot.

#8: Finnish nature is the best.

#2: [laughs] It is.

#5: And also like the environment around me, like when I look outside, I want to see clean and lively environment.

[Collective nodding and mumbling in an agreeing fashion]

M: Okay, so what are your attitudes towards companies' environmental sustainability?

#2: The environmental sustainability of companies is not something I actively look for, but if I see that it is sustainable it's a really big plus but yeah...

#1: I would say that it is important to me, but at the same time if I'm being realistic I don't really know enough so if there is some firm that I don't know if they are environmentally sustainable then I might not look into it and then yeah like.. It's important but the reality is quite different than what I actually think and do

#3: I would say for me it's always a plus technically but then again in modern day its more of a buzz word even if it doesn't mean that much in reality in a sense if its proven that its actually environmental then it's a plus but in general it just comes off as a buzzword

#6: If it has some negative connotations, then I maybe wouldn't choose it

#8: Personally, I don't actively look for it but its good if they are responsible and a minus if not.

#1: Agreed.

#7: Yeah, like what #3 said, in general like when you see a minced meat packaging but in the end of the day, they are still selling cow meat and the packaging does not offset the actual environmental effect

#5: Yeah and its used so much that it doesn't mean that much anymore. you see it like everywhere like yeah, yeah environmentally friendly it's like a norm now and we just see it and then you're like ok

#8: On the other hand, if they are not environmentally friendly is it probable that they will actually do it in the long run?

#5: Yeah like for example... I don't remember what it was... Oh yeah, the Félix ketchup they had this "if you buy this your carbon footprint is great" ... Then I read what it actually meant it was that they blow up the bottles inside the factory they don't transport them in the big bottles they transport the tiny

capsules... I don't know what it means actually you can just say things... actually it can be completely different

#1: Hmm, yeah good point.

M: Why do you think companies' environmental sustainability to be important or not?

#8: I think it has become like as a term overused that if they are really doing it that's an investment that they get PR because of those reasons and activity for the future but I agree that the term is a bit overused

#5: I don't know if its overused or Is it a new standard that you have to have so if you don't have it consumer are going to be like that you are different in a bad way

#8: If it's a standard then it's a good thing

#5: Yeah, yeah, that's the thing if you don't have it in the packaging, if this doesn't say that it is environmentally friendly [showing a water bottle]

#3: Well, yeah, maybe going a bit further on that one, but honestly, it almost feels more honest to not have it since most use it just as a buzz word instead of having a base for it and then it just feels like they are lying to you.. and then like these not in any way organic or environmentally friendly products if they don't say it, then they are at least honest of what they are doing. Obviously, it's not good that they are not environmentally friendly, but at least they are honest.

#8: It's better than saying something that you are not.

[Collective nodding and mumbling in an agreeing fashion]

#7: Overall it is the sensible thing to do for a company to be environmentally friendly. It's the humane thing to do, we are still people, so you want to do good

#5: Yeah that's the big reason, that's what we want to believe, and there is a lot of money behind it so if you don't do it, you're going to lose a share of the market

#8: Yeah like was previously said its either a plus or a minus

#6: Aren't there long-term benefits for being environmentally sustainable for the company itself?

#5: Yeah, yeah...

#6: So, I mean that I understand if companies don't have money invest o be sustainable in the short run... but if they do, I mean...

#1: I think there are many reasons why companies should be environmentally sustainable... There is the obvious one that the earth is dying and we have to do something about it and the other reason is that consumers are becoming more aware of it and like #5 said that it's kind of like a standard already which then brings us to the fact it's kind of like a buzz word but then there are firms like I think Oatly is actually one of the firms that for real are kind of environmentally friendly... then if we just think of actually being environmentally friendly, one reason is money because you can get a customer base and also... I haven't heard that before that it can be beneficial for a company in the long run but that too.

#8: Yeah, there was one interview of a corporate executive, I think it was KONE, but according to him the only way to be successful in the future is to be environmentally sustainable

M: Ok, so everyone probably already knows what fast fashion is, but just to remind you: fast fashion is clothing that emphasizes making fashion trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers. Here are some examples of fast fashion brands. [Moderator shows the focus group an image with fast fashion brands: H&M, Zara, Uniqlo, Topshop, Forever 21, Primark, Bershka and



New Look] So, how would you describe your purchasing habits regarding fast fashion? For example, how often do you shop? How much do you spend at once? Do you go alone or with friends? Why?

#7: Well, overall all these brands that you showed us, I think one of the, what brings them all together is that when I'm travelling, I purchase a lot of these but at home I won't that much... Like when I'm in Stockholm I shop like Uniqlo. In Finland I know the market very well like where to find what I'm looking for but when I'm abroad - everyone wants to shop abroad for some reason and you don't know any places, and these are the brands you see in the city center.

#1: Also, I think it's a bit like fooling yourself that I'm on vacation now so it's ok like money wise you allow yourself to shop more and also you don't think so much

#2: Yeah also when I go abroad, I like to think they have different clothes than here. ok I guess like H&M has same clothes everywhere but still the colors might be a bit different like in Spain.

M: Ok, how about in Finland?

#8: I'm pretty cheap, so if I don't need something, I don't usually buy it

#3: [laughs] Yeah, I don't have much money

#8: I recognize Uniqlo, I have my new coat from there, but then again, I needed a new coat, so I needed a new one... I also often buy things I really won't need that much from fast fashion, like theme costumes.

#4: I usually buy things I need from brands I recognize, it's easier cause I know pretty much what I'm getting, like H&M.

#1: Honestly, I would describe my fast fashion purchasing habits as being awful... You know I would want to think that I am aware of all the bad things and I guess I am but there are some things about them that are not going through... cause now that I'm thinking every single thing that I am now wearing is fast fashion, even my earrings... So yeah. It's kind of distressing to realize things like this... For example, these pants I'm wearing [points at white pants], I'm not a very impulsive shopper, but then again, I went to the store and needed black pants and saw these and thought well spring is coming, why not buy these they are nice.

#6: I can kind of relate to that... I don't see myself as being impulsive but regarding fast fashion I can make quick choices.

#2: I shop quite often and buy little at once, but every time I go to a store, I find something even though I don't look for it.

#1: Yeah

[Moderator gives the focus group photographs of different good and bad things that may or may not be associated with fast fashion and has the focus group make groupings out of them]

#3: I think the plastic bottle kind of reminds me of fast fashion, because I know there is a lot of waste and plastic waste coming from them

#2: Yeah, and the plastics go also to the ocean like the turtles are affected too.

#1: Oh yeah no...

#7: Well I also kind of think that image with money, a lot of money reminds me, because a lot of money is spent on the clothes, the industry gets so much money because everyone buys them.

#3: Hmm, good point.

#1: Weirdly the salad picture also, cause it's such an Instagram photo, like people post photos on Instagram of the clothes so you have some sort of image of yourself so that's why the salad reminds me of that...

#4: [laughs] Yeah maybe a bit, wouldn't have thought of that.

#3: The nature picture reminds me of like a H&M sustainability advertisement, like a really fake feeling. The nature looks like an advertisement picture.

#8: Well I think that model reminds of fast fashion, because there are a lot of advertisements for like H&M with pretty models like that.

#1: Hmm yeah...

M: So, to sum it up, what do you think about fast fashion and why do you have this opinion?

#8: It's understandable as a business context, but I don't think in the long run it is not environmentally sustainable so it's not good

#3: Yeah

#6: It's almost like I know all these things inherently, but I don't think about it when I do shopping. Every now and then it's reminding me what is happening behind the scenes

#7: I feel like it is a thing in the past, we should wake up and think about the bad things happening

#3: Well I don't think it will go away, especially in America

#5: I have a hatred towards Primark, you showed the logo, I hate that company

#1: Me too

#5: The amount of junk they sell like a 1€ t-shirt, the amount that goes into it and...

#7: Also, like Zara, have you been to a store when its sale, oh my god, the whole store the concept it's just stuff on stuff

#3: In general, around the world where living standards are not high it's a necessity, they need cheap clothes so they can't afford to think of environment, but in richer countries it should be addressed

#1: I think fast fashion is bad as an industry, but as an individual you can make it less bad like recycle and take the clothes, I take the clothes I don't wear to the flea market and make it less bad

#8: Well, yeah but it's more work.

#1: True...

M: How do you gain information regarding fast fashion companies' and/or their practices and how trustworthy do you see this information to be through these channels?

#2: For me it's often a friend, like Anna, and I see it as being credible, it's usually news articles and I trust that information

#1: I find negative news trustworthy but the websites CSR reports on company websites I don't trust... probably because I believe it is kind of marketing and trying to hide the negative aspects, for example the H&M sustainability collection

#4: Yeah, it's greenwashing

#3: I find most of the information just from news or videos, I don't search for them proactively.

#7: For me it's pretty much the same...

#5: I maybe look for it if I'm buying something more expensive, but with cheap items I really expect it just not to be great.

#8: Yeah

M: What do you know about the environmental effects the fast fashion industry is responsible for?

#2: There is so much waste generated from the fast fashion industry, and not just like from the stuff we buy but also the stuff we don't buy and the manufacturing and stuff... It is not sustainable on the long run at all and it's really bad for the environment. We should not support it

#1: Yeah, a lot of waste, and also a lot of water goes into cotton

#3: And there is pollution from the factories

#4: Well, it's because the waste management systems in less developed countries are bad

#3: Yeah, I know

#8: I also know that the transportation causes some emissions

#2: I think the biggest issue is the waste still, cause so much is made and bought, it takes so much resources also

#6: I agree with that.

M: Do the environmental effects of fast fashion affect the way you think? Why is this?

#1: Well, of course, because I don't like that the environment is harmed

#3: Yeah, I don't want our planet to die.

[Collective nodding and mumbling in an agreeing fashion]

#1: Still sometimes, I don't want to think about these things...

[Moderator goes back to the images that have been already grouped and discusses the images, especially to do with the environment]

M: Well you were right that the environment generates a lot of waste. In addition to the textile waste, dyes and harmful chemicals are often let out to the nature. Also, the image of the plastic bottle was a link you made with fast fashion. That might be due to the large amounts of microplastics that end up in the sea from synthetic fabrics, such as polyester. Also, the picture with young people is often linked to fast fashion, since the largest amount of fast fashion is consumed by the younger population. Here are some infographics to show some environmental effects from the fast fashion industry.

[Moderator provides the group infographics with statistics, to show the real environmental issues the fast fashion industry is responsible for]

#1: Oh wow, these are bad.

[Collective nodding and mumbling in an agreeing fashion]

M: What do you believe are the issues with our consuming habits concerning fast fashion?

#4: If I had more money, I would buy more sustainable clothes but I'm a student so...

#1: Well there is room for improvement, like if you go to the flea market you can find items for cheaper, but it needs more effort and trouble... I guess when you have research done its easier but fast fashion is easy

#2: I don't like Primark at all either but in my case, I should buy less from like H&M

#7: I think our age is more knowledgeable of fast fashion and now a days I appreciate more about how long I can wear a cloth not like in high school when I bought trendier clothes and not good quality

#2: I think the feel and fit is important

#6: Well I think everyone maybe buys more than they actually need or will wear a lot.

#2: Yeah, I do buy stuff I need but also unnecessary stuff, that's a problem.

#5: Avoiding the stores could help, also to do with impulse shopping.

#6: Yeah.

M: Why do you think that the environmental issues of the fast fashion industry do not affect consumers attitudes and why is there an inconsistency with possible awareness and actions?

#8: The consumer culture is... they are teaching people to buy things faster, faster and more and if they are cheap and look good why not, but more conscious bubbles are growing more yearly that our generation is more aware... I know people who actually care about these things but then again there are people who don't care.

#7: If someone is not conscious, its perfect because you can always find something new for cheap .

#4: One of the biggest things is that even though we are aware of these things, we don't see the bad things in real life, they don't affect us directly, we are human beings, it's really easy to just not think.

#6: Adding to that point it's the scale of the thing, that we don't think an individual can change anything.

#1: Yeah...

#3: Older generation is more stagnant for their habits if they buy fast fashion, but the new generation in Scandinavia it is not as important to have such a pristine image but in America you have to look so perfect on the outside why they probably buy fast fashion, for example Instagram can affect those

#2: Yeah, I think it's important for some people to have some sort of status and nice clothes help with that

#3: True.

M: Why should we change our consuming habits towards fast fashion?

#5: This wonderful ball we live on will not survive if we continue that's one of the big things, I want to live long and my children to live longer and have a good nature.

[Collective nodding and mumbling in an agreeing fashion]

#6: I totally agree, we have to think about the future and what the earth can intel.

#3: Yep.

M: Ok, so what sustainable changes can the fast fashion industry implement in order to affect our attitudes and possibly behavior?

#3: I think that fast fashion is not going to change itself; it is way too profitable, maybe the government should force them to change or something.

#8: Yeah...

#5: Money talks.

#5: Well maybe on long term they might change for more sustainable, like a sustainable example is Patagonia which has demand but on the other hand its more expensive for companies so.

#3: Companies could recycle.

#4: Maybe they could use more recycled materials and make less clothing. Also clothing that can be worn for longer times.

#1: Yea.

M: How do you see the future of fast fashion? If more sustainable – How?

#6: It will become more sustainable if its forced

#3: Yeah, at some point they have to, or we are all going to die

#1: But on the other hand, its fast fashion, so isn't its kind definition not sustainable so the direction would be that the mentality disappears. And I bet it's going to happen but it's going to happen really slow and it's going to need a change in people's attitudes and some forcing, because it's now so profitable

#5: I don't think fast fashion will completely go away, but it will probably diminish

#8: People who are more stuck on their habits will probably die and the conscious side will grow, and people will wake up and change

M: Well, how do you see the future of consumer purchasing habits regarding fast fashion?

#6: Consumer habits will change before the change in the industry into purchasing less, and when the demand is lower the production is lower.

#8: I think also that consumers will start purchasing less with time.

#3: Maybe it could be trendier to wear sustainable clothes

#2: Yeah maybe.

#1: I really hope they will change, I should too.

[Collective nodding and mumbling in an agreeing fashion]

M: Thank you everyone for your participation in this focus group. Your discussions have been very interesting to follow.